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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 001604

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ELAB](#) [ETRD](#) [TC](#)

SUBJECT: UAE CAMEL JOCKEY SOLUTION: ROBOTS

REF: ABU DHABI 1152

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Deputy Prime Minister and de facto Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed told Ambassador April 10 that the UAE was working to resolve the camel jockey/trafficking in persons (TIP) problem. Sheikh Hamdan, who is also Chairman of the Camel Racing Federation, said the UAE has already taken several serious steps to address the issue, referring to the new law banning jockeys under age 16 from taking part in camel races, and to the successful testing of a robot camel jockey. End Summary.

12. (C) Ambassador called on Sheikh Hamdan April 10 to review a number of bilateral and other issues (non-TIP topics reported septel). Attending the meeting were MFA U/S Abdullah Rashid Al Noaimi; Sheikh Hamdan's office manager Ambassador Sultan Al Romeithi; Abu Dhabi Deputy Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed's special advisor Yousef Al Otaiba; and Pol Chief.

13. (C) Before Ambassador could conclude her tour d'horizon overview of various military, FTA, and regional issues, Sheikh Hamdan exclaimed, "I have been waiting for this meeting." He noted that the UAE leadership was concerned about the TIP report that will be sent to Congress, and was therefore rapidly implementing measures to address the underage camel jockey problem. Sheikh Hamdan, who announced in mid-March that a new law banning underage camel jockeys would take effect by March 31, added that the UAE is very serious and responsive about this. He said the UAE was working to make sure this is resolved expeditiously. The Ambassador made clear that it was important to maintain "positive momentum," especially as the U.S. and UAE are headed into the second round of FTA negotiations in May. The UAE needs to take immediate and visible steps to help the young camel jockeys working in the UAE, including rescue and compassionate repatriation, the Ambassador told Sheikh Hamdan. She underscored the urgent need for rescue and repatriation data that would illustrate UAE efforts to combat the problem.

14. (C) In addition to the new law, Sheikh Hamdan signaled another positive development -- the testing of a camel jockey robot. The camel jockey prototype was tested April 9 in Abu Dhabi as Minister of Presidential Affairs Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed looked on. When the UAE camel racing season resumes in October 2005, camel owners will use remote-controlled, lightweight robots instead of underage children. (Note: The new law bans jockeys under 16 years of age from competing in camel races, and stipulates that their weight should exceed 45 kilograms. Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labor contacts have confirmed that the two-month grace period for repatriating the children began on March 31. After that date, employers will be subject to penalties and prosecution. However, the UAEG has not yet published the law in the official gazette. End note.)

15. (C) Comment: The UAEG continues to emphasize its commitment to resolve the camel jockey issue. The UAEG has heavily publicized that the law went into effect March 31 and that the grace period started ticking on that date. While repatriation of the camel jockeys has started with jockeys trickling into source country embassies, we have been repeating to officials here that they need to accelerate and document this process. Meanwhile, after meeting with Interior Minister Sheikh Saif bin Zayed on April 6, a UNICEF regional director, Rima Saleh, commended the UAE for working to resolve the underage camel jockey problem and urged other countries to follow the UAE's example. We will remind Sheikh Hamdan again in a scheduled April 12 meeting of the urgency of documenting the repatriation and rescue. End Comment.

SISON